

Los Padres National Forest



Figueroa Mountain Wildflower Update - First Update of the 2012 Season

Greetings and welcome to the 2012 Wildflower Season! The wildflowers on Figueroa Mountain are off to a very unusual start, largely due to the lack of rain, hot days, cold days, warm nights, freezing nights and late season snow (10 inches last weekend). It is no surprise the flowers are exhibiting so much confusion. Flowers that normally do not bloom until mid – April/early May bloomed in January and are now drying out. Other flowers, such as the chocolate lilies, which should be out by now are just beginning to develop their stem. The poppies and lupine at the higher elevations are in bloom quite early, while on normal years, they do not bloom until April. I have been holding off in writing the update because of the strange weather and odd flower behavior, but it is beginning to look as though it may be a short and rapid flower season this year.

Starting at the first cattle guard, buttercups, fiddlenecks, Johnny jump-ups, blue dicks, Chinese houses, hummingbird sage, fiesta flowers, lomatium, miner's lettuce and an occasional lupine are in bloom. As one makes the turn along the second bend, on the left, a few small pink owl's clovers can be seen. Along the rock formation on the right, look for vivid, Red Indian paintbrush starting to bloom along with a few blue dicks. Twenty yards further, on the right, one will find some shooting stars, Johnny jump-ups and lomatium. Another 25 yards down the road will bring you to a slope on the left where miniature lupine, sky lupine and buttercups are unhurriedly beginning to bloom. As one continues under the tree canopy, sky lupine, Johnny jump-ups, buttercups and blue dicks are peeking through.

As you continue up the hill, California poppies are beginning to bloom throughout the mountain. While they are in no big hurry to put on a big show, they are starting to emerge. As you get to the second cattle guard, look on the ground to the right and find a pleasant surprise....tiny cream cups in bloom, along with some fillaree. On a normal year, these little beauties are at least twice this size and do not bloom until mid to late April.

Other wildflowers to look for as you continue your uphill climb include buttercups, goldfields, coreopsis, shooting stars, California poppies, blue dicks, fillaree, royal lupine, and on the serpentine formation, beautiful pink prickly phlox. Lovely orange wall flowers, another late variety, are quite prolific just past the serpentine wall on the right.

At Vista Point (large gravel turnout about 11.4 miles from the bottom), shooting stars and buttercups are slowly blooming. In the serpentine area across the road, you'll see California poppies, buttercups, some shooting stars and another late season bloomer, golden yarrow.

In the field to the right, before Tunnell Ranch Road, look for a few shooting stars and wall flowers.

About a quarter mile beyond, on the infamous poppy hillside, surprisingly, the tuft poppies and lupine are in bloom. While the hillside is not exactly carpeted and the lupines are rather small, it is still quite beautiful and worth a visit. There are many bare spots on the hillside and seeing how this year has been so peculiar for the wildflowers, it is uncertain if it will actually fill in. Strangely enough, this section seems to be the area with the most flowers. There are small carpets of lupine on some of the hillside in this area, especially some right above the poppies. The bush lupine is also in bloom throughout the entire section.

From Ranger Peak to Cachuma Saddle, one will find bush poppies and bush lupine as they begin to bloom. Look for Indian paintbrush as it gently colors portions of this section in its beautiful shade of red. The sticky leaf monkey flower is immensely confused. It started blooming in late January and rapidly dying off, another confused late bloomer. Some California poppies and buttercups can be seen here. Fiesta flowers, coreopsis and purple nightshade are gradually making an appearance here as well.

Sunset Valley has very little to see at this point. Aside from some bush poppies and some very perplexed prickly phlox, spiny lupine, morning glories, coreopsis and milk thistle are beginning to appear. Again, these flowers are a month early.

Happy Canyon is quite interesting. As one makes themselves to the campground, look for California poppies, bush lupine, bush poppies, buttercups, blue dicks, morning glories, clematis, fiesta flowers and a few fuchsia-flowering gooseberries.

Just beyond the campground, on the rock formations to the right, orange/red Indian paintbrush is adorning the rocks. Past the campground and before the shooting area, look for confused, but striking Catalina mariposa lilies and blue-eyed grass. Coreopsis and California poppies can also be seen in this area. Continuing down the hill, shooting stars, morning glories, coreopsis and prickly phlox can also be seen along with some lupine, bush lupine and bush poppies. The final blooms of some sticky leaf monkey flowers are also evident.

That's all for this update. Look for our next wildflower update in two weeks. Until then, happy viewing! For more information, please contact Helen Tarbet at 805-925-9538, ext. 246, or by e-mail at htarbet@fs.fed.us.



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